

How it Feels to See Again After
Thirty Years

FRANK FISH

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How It SEE After Ye

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MY WIFE and I walked home from my business college at five-thirty, as we had done hundreds of times. After dinner, she busied herself in the kitchen, while I turned on the radio to hear the news flashes. I listened for ten minutes or so, then she came in.

"If you will turn off the radio," she said, "I will read to you."

It was about the time of the murder of Lingle, the *Chicago Tribune* reporter, and she began reading about that. I don't know whether my eyes were open or shut; to the blind it makes no difference—probably they were shut. But something caused me to turn my head and lift my lids. And it seemed at that moment as if a curtain slowly began to rise. There came into view in front of me, and across the room, a davenport; at one end was a blue cushion, at the other end a golden cushion.

I interrupted the reading.

"Emma," I said, "something has happened."

"What is it?"

Her voice sounded frightened. Remember, for thirty years I had never given up hope that my sight would be restored. I know she must have felt long since, in the bottom of her heart, that there was no hope.

"I think I can see," I said.

VAGUELY, I saw a stranger rise from a chair near by. A rather large, gray-haired, motherly woman whom I had never seen before. My wife, of course. Not the woman, brown-haired, rosy-cheeked, whose picture I had cherished in my mind for thirty years. I would never, never have known this one.

"What do you see?" she asked.

For three decades J. FRANK FISH suddenly his sight came back, but which his eyes opened. In this tells of the unique experience of

"I see a davenport over there—and one blue cushion, one gold."

"What else?"

"I see a whatnot in the corner, a picture on the wall with some ships—"

"Then it's true!" she cried.

It was too much for her. If I had not caught her, she would have fallen to the floor. She began to cry. I said:

"Don't cry. Let's laugh. I'm seeing the world anew."

For years I had had an agreement with my physician, Doctor Bonine, of Niles, Michigan, that if anything unusual happened, I was to let him know at once and, if necessary, take the next train for Niles. So, as soon as my wife recovered a little from her excitement, I went to the telephone and called him. He considered his appointments, and told me to come and see him on the second day. I hung up. My wife said:

"Well, what shall we do now?"

I said to her:

"We still have forty-five minutes, haven't we?"—before the evening session of school, I meant.

"Yes."

"Then suppose we go on reading the

paper," I said, seating myself again.

The discovery of a new world began at once. The following morning, while I was shaving, it occurred to me that I might as well open my eyes and look at myself. I did so, and thought:

"Who in the world is this fellow I've been shaving?"

A total stranger looked out at me from the mirror. I should never have recognized myself. Gray hair, and none too much of it. Broad face. He was another one I had never seen before!

PERHAPS the greatest thrill of all, in a way, the thing that touched my heart, came next day while I was at Niles. Doctor Bonine first put me through tests with alphabets.

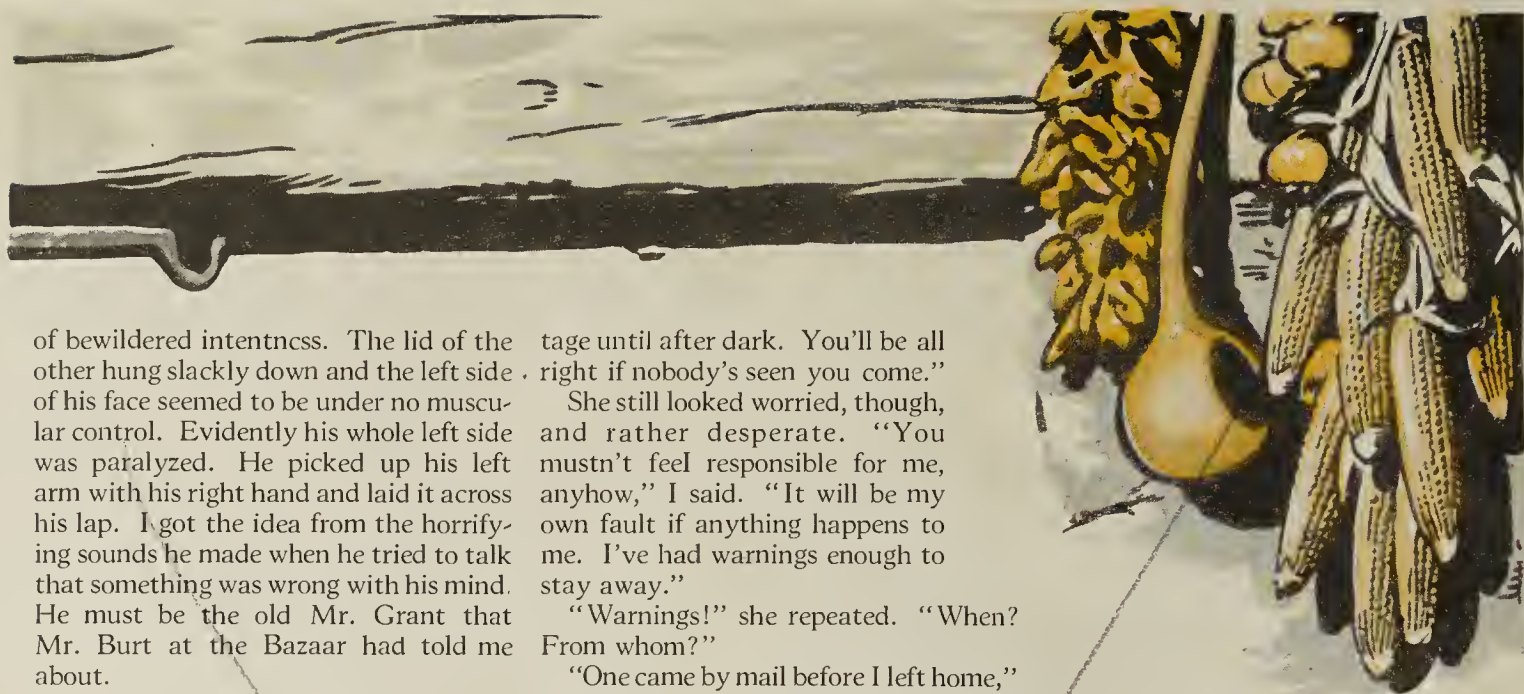
"What letter is that?" he asked, pointing to the chart.

"H."

"And that?"

"P."

And so on. Curiously, type was the one thing that seemed thoroughly familiar to me after all the years. The doctor tried my reading ability at various distances. Then he turned the chart around and showed me the back.



of bewildered intentness. The lid of the other hung slackly down and the left side of his face seemed to be under no muscular control. Evidently his whole left side was paralyzed. He picked up his left arm with his right hand and laid it across his lap. I got the idea from the horrifying sounds he made when he tried to talk that something was wrong with his mind. He must be the old Mr. Grant that Mr. Burt at the Bazaar had told me about.

I HEARD footsteps on the gravel outside, and, looking out through the open door, I saw Lucy coming, Lucy in her khaki breeches and her cone-shaped straw hat.

She turned at the foot of the steps for a leisurely survey of the peaceful scene. In my impatience to let her know I was there, I went to the door and stepped out on the veranda. She heard me and whipped around, astonished. Her eyes widened as she saw who I was, and her face flushed deeply. She said in a low, tense voice, "Go back! Inside the house, before they see you!"

The next moment she had followed me in, closed and barred the door behind her, and then, on second thought, unbarred and opened it again.

"I'm sorry if I've got you into trouble by coming," I said. "I certainly didn't mean to, and I didn't come from idle curiosity, either. My name's James Blake, and what I came out for originally was to see what I'd better do about my land."

She looked at me in astonishment. "You aren't the man who registered under that name at the Eagle House yesterday?" she said.

"He was an impostor," I replied, "though I haven't been able to think of any reason why he should be impersonating me. And, for that matter, I don't know that I can prove, offhand, that I'm the real one and he's a fake."

"You don't need to prove it to me," she said, with a friendly relaxation of manner. Then, to my amazement, she took me by the arm and led me around in front of the old gentleman's chair. "This is James Blake, Grandfather," she said, speaking slowly and distinctly; "Peter Townsend's grandson."

"Grandfather can't speak very well since he had his stroke," Lucy explained to me, "but he understands everything perfectly. I don't know what I'm going to do with you," she went on. "I don't know how to smuggle you out. I think you'll have to stay here in the cot-

tage until after dark. You'll be all right if nobody's seen you come."

She still looked worried, though, and rather desperate. "You mustn't feel responsible for me, anyhow," I said. "It will be my own fault if anything happens to me. I've had warnings enough to stay away."

"Warnings!" she repeated. "When? From whom?"

"One came by mail before I left home," I answered. "The other one, last night, came by telephone and the wrong man got it—the impostor, I mean. At least, he was looking badly frightened when he came out of the telephone booth."

"Who wrote the warning letter? Do you know?"

"It wasn't signed," I told her, "but I think it came from a real estate man in Huntington—a man named Bowdish."

"Bowdish," she echoed. "Why in the world should it come from him?"

I went for my rucksack, meaning to show her my two letters with the matched postage stamps, but she stopped me. "Wait a minute," she said. "I want to get Grandfather out on the veranda first. He always sits out there for a while on fine mornings and we're less likely to be interrupted if everything looks natural."

So I helped her get the old gentleman to his feet and supported him while she dragged his big chair out to the sunny corner of the veranda. I knew she didn't want me to appear outside, so I didn't offer to help her with him, but watched with admiration how beautifully she managed him.

WHEN she had got him comfortably bestowed in his chair she took a last look down the valley and then came back to me.

"I really think," she said reflectively, "that you are safer here until dark than you would be trying to get away. They never come up here in the morning and they've been busier than usual for the past two or three days. You see, there's no way out except by the road past the ravine. And we haven't a boat. So, unless you wanted to swim . . ."

I interrupted rather briskly. "I'm not thinking about getting away. I came in thinking that you needed help, that you were in danger from something or somebody. I'm not going to leave until I can get you out of it."

She turned away suddenly when I said that, to hide her face from me. If I'd had any misgivings that the help I offered

was unnecessary or that her situation was less desperate than I'd supposed, it was gone now.

When she turned back to me, though, a moment later, she'd recovered her self-command completely. She seated herself beside a table and nodded me to another chair across the corner of it. "You said you thought it was Mr. Bowdish who'd warned you to stay away. I wish you'd tell me why you think that."

I OPENED my rucksack and took out the two letters. I handed over Bowdish's own signed letter first.

She read it with a frown. "He told me," she said, "that he was buying the land himself. He said he was doing it so that we—that is, so that Grandfather shouldn't be turned out of his home."

"That's a perfectly plausible reason," I conceded. "He couldn't know that I wasn't the sort of person who would do exactly that thing. But this other letter"—I handed her the anonymous scrawl as I spoke—"goes rather farther, I think, than a man would for a purely disinterested motive."

She read the thing with an incredulous stare. "But why," she asked, when she'd finished with it, "do you think it came from Bowdish rather than from one of us—Jeff, for instance?"

"Is Jeff your brother?" I asked.

She shook her head. "I thought he was until we were about twelve years old. We grew up here together as children. But why didn't you think one of us, on the place, wrote the letter?"

I showed her the postage stamps that had come on the two envelopes and demonstrated to her the way they fitted.

Lucy admired this as a piece of good detective work, but remained rather incredulous of the conclusions it brought her to. "What could he gain by writing you a letter like that?"

"Well," I said, "it might lead me to accept his offer (Continued on page 129)

Feels to Again Thirty ars



© KEYSTONE

was a prisoner of darkness. Then it was a strange, new world on
interview by FRANK M. HILL *he*
meeting all the world as a stranger

"What's that letter in the upper left-hand corner?"

"That 'letter' is a cow. Next to it is a pig. And next to that, a goat. Anything else?"

He laughed. "You really do see, then!"

He produced a trial lens which strengthened my vision wonderfully.

"Now, if you'll come back in two weeks," he said, "I will have glasses ready for you that will make all the difference."

"Do I have to wait two weeks?" I asked. "I'm going to attend a convention in Columbus next week; if I had the glasses then, it might help in my work."

PERHAPS I sounded wistful. Thirty years is a long time to wait. Anyhow, he sent upstairs for an optician, who did a fast job, and in a little while I owned a pair of glasses that literally opened the world to me.

Then it was time to go. Doctor Bonine left me and went down to his outer offices, telling me to follow. There were two waiting-rooms, both crowded with people who had come to consult him

about their eyes. I suppose the doctor said something to them before I got there. Anyhow, all were standing when I walked in; most of them had tears in their eyes. Tears of joy. Tears of renewed hope. They had seen me arrive a little while before, and be helped up the stairs. Now I came down those stairs alone, needing no help. *For I could see. . .*

It is very hard to convey any adequate idea of my sensations at the outset. You can imagine—after thirty years! I was profoundly thankful, of course. But I was perplexed, too. I had learned how to live without sight and had fixed ideas, mostly mistaken as it turned out, about the looks of things. When I could see again, objects literally hurled themselves at me. So many of them! And all so different from what I had imagined.

One of the things a normal person knows from long habit is what *not* to look at. Things that don't matter, or that confuse, are simply shut out of the seeing mind. I had forgotten this, and tried to see everything at once; consequently I saw almost nothing. And what I did see seemed so different from my conceptions that my mind had to take a fresh stand to grasp it.

You might not think this would be so, since I formerly had my sight for almost thirty years before passing behind the cloud, and especially since I had lived actively afterward, almost as if I could see. But if you think that, you do not realize the rapid changes in the world today. Most people who see the changes taking place day by day do not. In the darkness I had used every means available to keep up to date, and knew the essentials of what was going on; but I did not know, and could not guess, what all the new objects coming into the world *looked* like. For the mind, more than most people know, feeds on visual images; it is literally impossible to imagine correctly an object never seen.

THEN, too, from the time I lost my sight, I had realized that certain scenes and faces were immensely precious; I wanted to preserve them, and since photographs would do no good, I had to keep them in my mind. Visual images fade unless refreshed; so every day, as if it were a religious ceremony, I used to run over in my mind consciously how certain people looked: my old grandmother, who had always been very dear to me; our little boy, whom we lost in 1892; my wife; certain others. I rehearsed them like a student, and dared not change them in any way, for fear of losing them altogether.

The world I lived with through my blindness, then, was the world of 1900, visually speaking. I had great difficulty at first getting clear impressions of anything in the world of 1930.

My partner and I had carried on our business together day by day for years. I whispered to him, among the first,

about my recovery; and after my return from Niles, when I walked into the office, I plainly saw a man sitting at a desk where I knew he sat. So I knew the stranger must be my partner. I looked at him curiously. He returned the look for a good while.

"Do you really see me?" he asked at last.

"Yes," I said, "I certainly do."

I hardly know which of us had more pleasure in the fact. But it was a strange experience.

He brought the office girls and introduced them—girls I had worked with day after day and had called by their first names, who had been my loyal "eyes" and were daughters to me.

"Which girl just shook hands with you?" my partner asked—"Bess, or Mabel, or Celia?"

Blind, I should have known instantly. But I had to admit:

"I don't know. Let them speak."

I closed my eyes.

"That is Bess," I said, when one of them spoke; but when I opened my eyes I could not tell which had spoken!

It was three days before I was able to correlate and control my visual images well enough to recognize each of the girls by sight.

VERY soon I realized that if it was a great pleasure to see again, it could also be very disquieting. I lost much of my self-confidence. I had learned my way about without sight. To learn all over again, with sight, upset established habits.

Take automobiles. I have been familiar with them from the first, but for the most part as the blind are familiar. When I lost my sight, the electric car was trying to establish a place for itself. I remember that the old-fashioned horse-and-buggy livery stable at the corner of Michigan and Jackson, in downtown Chicago, about that time was changed to the "electric" livery stable, and they installed electric taxicabs. Great, lumbering vehicles, with the driver perched up behind. Streets were not paved; they bumped and jolted. Batteries frequently ran out of

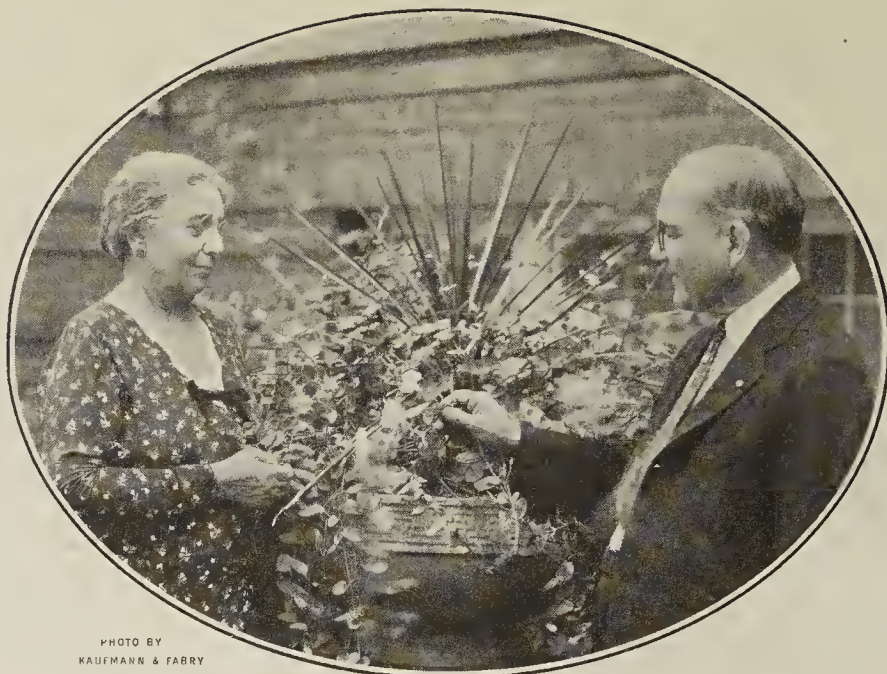


PHOTO BY
KAUFMANN & FABRY

J. Frank Fish and Mrs. Fish in the garden of their home in Chicago. The wife who had stood at his side for thirty years appeared as a stranger to him when he suddenly regained his sight

IN THE prime of a busy life, J. Frank Fish, founder and president of the Northwestern Business College of Chicago, became totally blind. For thirty years, from 1900 until a few months ago, while the world was probably moving faster and farther than during any similar period in history, he saw absolutely nothing of what was going on. Visually, it was as if he had withdrawn to Mars.

Mr. Fish never gave up hope. Nine years ago he found a physician who shared his faith that some day he might regain his sight. Patiently and with infinite courage, year after year, he followed a prescribed treatment with seldom a sign of improvement.

A year ago he suffered a severe attack of "flu." When he recovered, the doctor said:

"Do you know what has happened?"

"What?"

"We are back exactly where we were a year ago. Are you discouraged?"

"No. Are you?"

"No."

"Then let's carry on."

In June of this year, by a medical miracle which has aroused world-wide wonder, he recovered the full use of one eye and is likely to recover the other.

Seldom, if ever, has a man, after such an "absence," been privileged to look again upon this planet with the eyes of a virtual stranger, and to report what he sees—the changes which have come to pass. Here is the inspiring, thrilling report that Frank Fish gives us of his amazing adventure.

"juice" unexpectedly, and the cab had to be pushed or towed, perhaps for blocks, to some recharging station.

That was almost the only kind of non-horse-drawn vehicle, except street cars, before I lost my sight. In 1904 or 1905, after my sight went, my partner and I together became owners of one of the early "steamers." It was the kind of car you entered by a rear door. Two seats faced each other in the tonneau, accommodating two passengers each,

with room for a fifth in front by the driver.

In later years I traveled from one end of the country to the other, usually alone. But I never went on the streets alone. I always got a taxi at the depot and was driven to the hotel.

SO IN one way or another I knew all about automobiles. Yet I was utterly unprepared for the sight of an automobile and for motor traffic on even a comparatively quiet outlying boulevard.

Between the school and my home is such a boulevard. While I was blind I crossed fearlessly four times a day for years, guided by my wife or one of the girls. But the first time I came to that street after regaining my sight, I was terrified.

"I can never cross!" I said.

Cars darted at us. It felt like being chased by huge bugs. I wanted to run.

Automobiles are three times as big as I supposed. I thought of them as just a little bigger than the actual tonneau. They are many times as numerous as I imagined. And far faster. Shortly before I lost my sight my wife and I had a tandem bicycle, a "bicycle built for two." We were thrilled at its speed. Now I saw young couples rushing by at a terrifying rate.

Automobiles really terrified me. But I approve of them. I mean to get one and learn to drive it myself. Indeed, everything I see seems to show progress.

Somebody asked me, "What do (Continued on page 165)

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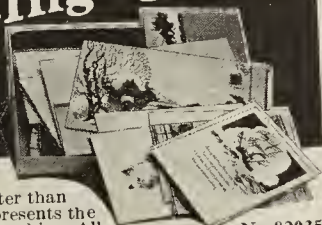
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I believe that the unrealities of life on this plane, often called the world, the flesh, and the devil, when understood and kept in their right places, are not evil but the reverse side of good, and are our servants and not our masters.

I believe that God our Father is one in every way, a God of love, and that we can realize His presence through the understanding of The Christ within us, and that we can talk to him just as we talk to any friend.

I believe that The Christ is manifested in order to show us the law of liberty and joy in all things, but that the Scribes and Pharisees continue to obscure his message, this being a passing phase.

I believe in the positive and not the negative, in joy and not in sorrow, in the unlimited and not the limited, in light and not in darkness, in abundance and not in lack, in God the Father and not in the devil.

I believe that we are spiritually one with God the Father, that all partition or duality is unnecessary, and that by love, faith, and obedience we can release ourselves from material darkness and ignorance and enter into the peace which passeth all understanding.

I believe that in my own earthly life these truths have been fully demonstrated, and that only my limited senses—here, now—keep me from their unlimited expression.

How It Feels to See Again After Thirty Years

(Continued from page 40)

you see that is less attractive than thirty years ago?"

I could think of nothing. Newspapers are much more interesting. And movies—the only movie I ever saw, prior to 1930, was produced in about 1899 through what they called, I think, the kinetoscope. It showed cavalry swimming a stream in Cuba shortly after the close of the Spanish-American War. When I first went to a movie theater after recovering my sight, the pictures, mechanically, were a revelation to me. I had no idea they had progressed so far, and at first, if I had not known better, I should have thought the actors were actually on the stage. I was disappointed in the sound reproduction; the talking was not distinct. Maybe we picked a poor theater.

Airplanes have not impressed me as much as automobiles. There aren't so many of them—and they don't chase me! I haven't had a ride yet—I mean to.

The cities are more beautiful and cleaner. The lights at night are a great contrast to thirty years ago. And the buildings . . .

The tall buildings in Chicago in 1900 averaged about ten or twelve stories. One, I believe, was nineteen. The Monadnock Block was the largest office building.

After I lost my sight I learned to make my way with a guide through the downtown streets, wherever I wanted to go. Often I had to "guide" my guide. I knew the names of all the buildings, rode in the elevators, and knew how tall the great structures were. Yet all my intimate

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knowledge was no preparation for these marvelous new buildings as they actually look.

A day or so after my trip to Niles, a friend was taking me down La Salle Street in an automobile, and pointed out the new forty-four-story Board of Trade Building. The car went so fast, and the building was so tall, that I dropped down on the floor of the car to look up at it.

"That isn't all of it," my friend remarked; "there's still a tower to go on top."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "Where are they going to anchor it?"

Street cars were mostly cable cars when I lost my sight. A few lines were electrified, not many. The cars were small, with one double truck in the middle; the cars rocked badly, and the driver had to be careful to distribute his load or he would ditch it. When I noticed my first 1930 street car, I exclaimed:

"It's a block long!"

So it seemed to me. In Cleveland, I noticed, they run two of these monster cars hitched together.

OF COURSE, there's a big change in the looks of people. My wife and I were leaving the Twelfth Street Station after a trip, soon after I got my glasses, and she asked what I thought of the people along Mich gan Avenue.

"I never saw so many fat-faced men in my life," I said.

In the nineties, beards, mustaches, and sideburns were the thing. They gave men's faces a longish look. Now that everybody is clean-shaven, to me their faces look fat.

"How about the women?" my wife asked.

"They remind me," I said, "of how you used to look when you were dressing; when you had your petticoat on, but not your dress."

"That's the way you'll see all of them now," said she.

It took a little time to get used to short skirts. But soon I realized that modern women are far more graceful in their dress and movements than the women I had carried in mind all the years. In my day, they wore skirts to the ground, with bustles; they had artificial wasp waists, long hair, big hats; they took mincing steps. Women today walk naturally and gracefully. Their hair is neat. They look healthy.

Men, on the whole, seem neater. Their clothes have not changed so much as women's, but they dress better. And almost every man shaves every day. In the nineties, a man who shaved four times a week was keeping up appearances in grand style.

The open country is one thing that you'd think wouldn't change. But I found it far more attractive and prosperous-looking than I remembered it.

A few days after my sight was restored, my brother took us for a long drive through central and southern Ohio, the part of the country where I was born and raised. I was accustomed to rather bleak, lonely-looking farmhouses and rail fences, and roads that were either a sea of mud or a cloud of dust. But the majority of houses I saw looked as if they might be city homes, with all sorts of conveniences,

mowed lawns, neat wire fences, automobiles, fine all-weather roads.

Many have electricity. In the little town of two hundred where my mother died, they have it. I can remember when we used grease lamps and candles on the farm, and we thought the first kerosene lamp a marvel. Even in the city, thirty years ago, gas was common for lighting.

I was impressed by a visit to our old farm. We still own it, and I have visited it often with my brother in the thirty years. This time I saw it, and hardly recognized a thing. That seemed odd to others; but they had seen the changes as they took place, and got used to one before the next came along. To me, they all came in a heap. Trees had been cut down, and there was a pasture and meadow where I remembered woods. In another place, trees had grown up and there was a woods where I remembered a field.

I told my wife after this trip that if I could have my sight for only one thing, I'd want it for nature. I can get along with people without seeing them. But nature! Not to see hills, flowers, trees, clouds, sunsets, lilacs and roses, green of spring, gold of autumn, birds, squirrels, butterflies, stars—to be always shut in a dark room without these—that's one of the real tragedies of blindness.

If there is one vital human lesson in my experience—aside from the fact that we live in a swiftly changing world in which every Columbus ought to find a chance to discover his America—I think it is a lesson of coöperation. As a boy, my father and mother taught me that when somebody in authority told me to do a thing, I was to do it. I have tried to teach the same thing to my students. When I first went to Doctor Bonine, I carried a letter from another physician, which said in part:

Mr. Fish is a good patient. He will follow your instructions implicitly. If you tell him to swim to the eight-mile crib, he will try his level best to do it.

FOR nine years, under Doctor Bonine's orders, I put drops in my eyes three times a day. For nine years, twice a day, somebody else, usually my wife, dropped powders in my eyes. Doctor Bonine alone could not have given me my sight; I could not have done it myself. He told me what to do; I did it religiously. My reward was the blessed chance to look this good world squarely in the eye once more.

If anyone foolishly believes there is no such thing as progress, let him go through such an experience as mine.

If anyone blindly believes in a lack of opportunities, let him suddenly be dazzled by this modern world as I have been.

If anyone is a scoffer and declares that the rewards of faith and patience and coöperation are simply *empty hands*—he should have walked with me through my thirty dark years and shared my glorious reward.

This new world is wonderful. Nothing less. When I think of changes I have seen, it leaves me gasping; when I think of things under way—secrets still in laboratories and the minds of inventors or utterly unthought-of but soon to be discovered—I marvel at what changes I should find if I lost my sight *today* and regained it in 1960!

✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦

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